

Listing of the Claims:

1-48. (Cancelled)

49. (Previously presented) A method for detecting osteoarthritis in a human test subject, said method comprising:

a) quantifying a level of RNA encoded by a desmusulin (DMN) gene in a blood sample of said test subject; and

b) comparing said level of RNA in said sample of said test subject with a quantified level of control RNA encoded by said gene in blood samples of control subjects which are classified as healthy control subjects; and

c) comparing said level of RNA in said sample of said test subject with a quantified level of control RNA encoded by said gene in blood samples of control subjects which are classified as having osteoarthritis;

wherein a statistically significant determination resulting from steps (b) and (c) that expression of said gene in said sample of said test subject is different relative to said samples of said control subjects classified as healthy control subjects, and is similar relative to said samples of said control subjects classified as having osteoarthritis is indicative of osteoarthritis in said human test subject.

50. (Currently amended) The method of claim 49, wherein said blood sample of said test subject and said blood samples of said control subjects are selected from the group consisting of whole blood samples[[,]] and blood samples which have not been fractionated into cell types and blood samples which comprise leukocytes which have not been fractionated into cell types.

51. (Cancelled)

52. (Previously presented) The method of claim 49 or 50, wherein said quantifying of said level of RNA encoded by said gene in said sample of said test subject is effected relative to a housekeeping gene.

53. (Previously presented) The method of claim 49 or 50, wherein said quantifying of said level of RNA encoded by said gene in said sample of said test subject is effected by quantification of cDNA complementary to RNA encoded by said gene.

54. (Cancelled)

55. (Cancelled)

56. (Previously presented) The method of claim 49 or 50, wherein said quantifying of said level of RNA encoded by said gene is effected using quantitative PCR.

57. (Previously presented) The method of claim 49 or 50, wherein said quantifying of said level of RNA encoded by said gene is effected using an array.

58. (Previously presented) The method of claim 49 or 50, wherein said human test subject is suspected of having osteoarthritis.

59. (Previously presented) A method of detecting expression of a desmuslin (DMN) gene in a human test subject, said method comprising detecting RNA encoded by said gene in a blood sample of said test subject, using an oligonucleotide of predetermined sequence which is specific only for RNA encoded by said gene in said sample, and/or for cDNA complementary to RNA encoded by said gene in said sample.

60. (Previously presented) The method of claim 59, wherein said detecting of RNA comprises producing an amplification product from RNA encoded by said gene in said blood sample of said test subject, using primers specific only for RNA encoded by said gene and/or for cDNA complementary to RNA encoded by said gene.

61. (Previously presented) The method of claim 60, further comprising quantifying a level of RNA encoded by said gene in said sample.

62. (Previously presented) The method of claim 61, further comprising comparing said level of RNA to a quantified level of control RNA encoded by said gene in blood samples of control subjects.

63. (Cancelled)

64. (Cancelled)

65. (Currently amended) The method of claim 62 [[63]], wherein said control subjects are classified as healthy subjects.

66. (Previously presented) The method of claim 65, further comprising classifying said test subject as being a candidate for having osteoarthritis if said level of RNA encoded by said gene in said blood sample of said human test subject is significantly different relative to said quantified level of control RNA in said blood samples of said control subjects classified as healthy subjects.

67. (Currently amended) The method of claim 65, wherein further comprising classifying said test subject as being a candidate for having rheumatoid arthritis if said gene is differentially expressed in said blood sample of said human test subject relative to said blood samples of said control subjects classified as healthy subjects with a p value less than 0.05.

68. (Currently amended) A method of screening a human test subject for being a candidate for having osteoarthritis, said method comprising:

(a) detecting RNA encoded by a desmuslin (DMN) gene in a blood sample of said test subject, using an oligonucleotide of predetermined sequence which is specific only for RNA encoded by said gene in said sample, and/or for cDNA complementary only to RNA encoded by said gene in said sample; and

(b) quantifying a level of RNA encoded by said gene in said sample of said test subject; and

(c) comparing said level of RNA in said sample of said test subject to a quantified level of control RNA encoded by said gene in blood samples of control subjects classified as healthy subjects;

wherein said test subject is a candidate for having osteoarthritis if said level of RNA encoded by said gene in said blood sample of said human test subject is significantly

different relative to that of said control subjects classified as healthy subjects with a p value less than 0.05.

69. (Previously presented) The method of claim 68, wherein said detecting of RNA comprises producing an amplification product from RNA encoded by said gene in said blood sample of said test subject, using primers specific only for RNA encoded by said gene and/or for cDNA complementary to RNA encoded by said gene.

70. (Currently amended) The method of claim 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68 or 69, wherein said blood sample is selected from the group consisting of: a whole blood sample[.,] and a blood sample which has not been fractionated into cell types[.,] and a ~~blood sample which comprises leukocytes which have not been fractionated into cell types.~~

71. (Currently amended) A method of classifying expression of a desmuslin (DMN) gene in a human test subject, said method comprising:

(a) quantifying a level of RNA encoded by said gene in a blood sample of said test subject; and

(b) comparing said level of step (a) with quantified levels of RNA encoded by said gene in blood samples of control subjects classified as having osteoarthritis; and

(c) comparing said level of step (a) with quantified levels of RNA encoded by said gene in blood samples of control subjects classified as healthy subjects;

wherein a determination from steps (b) and (c) that said level of step (a) is statistically similar ($p < 0.5$) to said levels in said samples of said subjects classified as having osteoarthritis and is statistically different ($p < 0.5$) relative to said levels in said samples of said subjects classified as healthy subjects, results in a classification of expression of said gene in said test subject with that of said subjects classified as having osteoarthritis, and

wherein a determination from steps (b) and (c) that said level of step (a) is statistically different ($p < 0.5$) relative to said levels in said samples of said subjects classified as having osteoarthritis and is statistically similar ($p < 0.5$) to said levels in said samples of

said subjects classified as healthy subjects, results in a classification of expression of said gene in said test subject with that of said subjects classified as healthy subjects.

72. (Currently amended) The method of claim 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69 or 71, wherein:

- (i) said blood sample of said test subject and said blood samples of said control subjects are whole blood samples; or
- (ii) said blood sample of said test subject and said blood samples of said control subjects are blood samples which have not been fractionated into cell types; ~~or~~
- ~~(iii) said blood sample of said test subject and said blood samples of said control subjects are blood samples which comprise leukocytes which have not been fractionated into cell types.~~

73. (Previously presented) The method of claim 61, 68 or 71, wherein said quantifying of said level of RNA encoded by said gene is effected by quantifying said level of RNA relative to a housekeeping gene.

74. (Previously presented) The method of claim 61, 68 or 71, wherein said quantifying of said level of RNA encoded by said gene is effected by quantification of cDNA complementary to RNA encoded by said gene.

75. (Previously presented) The method of claim 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69 or 71, wherein said human test subject is suspected of having osteoarthritis.

76. (Cancelled)

77. (Cancelled)